

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC

AMEMBASSY HONGKONG

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 4207

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR,UR, US, VN, VS, CB, LA

SUBJ: SOVIET POLICY TOWARD INDOCHINA: SHIFTING WITH THE TIDE

REF: A. MOSCOW 4105; B. MOSCOW 1128 (EXDIS)

1. SUMMARY. AS THE FIGHTING IN CAMBODIA AND SOUTH VIETNAM HAS EXCALATED IN RECENT WEEKS, AND THE OPPOSITION TO FURTHER AID CONTINUES IN THE U.S., MOSCOW HAS SHIFTED TO MORE OPEN PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR HANOI AND THE KHMER INSURGENTS. IN CAMBODIA THE SOVIETS NOW LOOK TOWARD AN EARLY INSURGENT VICTORY AND ARE ADJUSTING THEIR TACTICS TO MAKE THE BEST OF THIS POSSIBILITY. IN VIETNAM THEY CONTINUE TO POR-
TTRAY THE COMMUNIST ADVANCES AS REACTION TO SAIGON-
INITIATED AGGRESSION AND REITERATE THAT THE PARIS
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AGREEMENT MUST BE THE BASIS OF A SETTLEMENT, BUT THEIR

CRITICISM OF THE U.S. HAS SHARPENED NOTICEABLY AND THEIR ENDORSEMENT OF HANOI'S OBJECTIVES HAS BECOME MORE EXPLICIT. SINCE THE U.S. CONGRESS AND PUBLIC HAVE VOICED RELUCTANCE TO PROVIDE MUCH FURTHER SUPPORT FOR THE TWO EMBATTLED REGIMES, MOSCOW PROBABLY CALCULATES THAT THE DETENTE COST OF MORE OPEN SUPPORT FOR HANOI HAS DROPPED AS REGARDS CAMBODIA AND PROBABLY VIETNAM AS WELL. IN LAOS, HOWEVER, MOSCOW SEEMS WELL SATISFIED WITH THE COALITION, AND DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE PUSHING TO DISRUPT THE FRAGILE BALANCE -- YET. BUT IN THE LONGER RUN MOSCOW PROBABLY SEES LASOS, LIKE CAMBODIA, COMING UNDER NORTH VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE, AND WE DOUBT IT WOULD HESITATE TO FOLLOW THE SHIFTING TIDE.

END SUMMARY.

2. REF B SETS OUT MOSCOW'S MAJOR POLICY OBJECTIVES IN INDOCHINA: INCREASING ITS INFLUENCE ALONG CHINA'S SOUTHERN BORDER AND BURNISHING ITS CREDENTIALS AS A SUPPORTER OF REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS. THESE OBJECTIVES LEAD IT TO SUPPORT HANOI MILITARILY, ECONOMICALLY AND POLITICALLY. THE CHIEF RESTRAINING FACTOR HS BEEN MOSCOW'S CONCERN ABOUT ITS DETENTE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE U.S.

3. AS THE CAMBODIAN CRISIS HAS DEEPENED OVER THE PAST TWO MONTHS, WITH THE U.S. UNABLE TO TAKE THE ACTIONS NECESSARY TO PREVENT AN INSURGENT TAKEOVER, MOSCOW HAS MOVED TOWARDS ENDORSEMENT OF THE INSURGENTS' GOALS AND AWAY FROM SUPPORT FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT. MOSCOW HAS BEEN KEENLY AWARE OF ITS LIMITED ASSEST IN CAMBODIA: VIRTUALLY NO WORKING LINKS WITH THE GKR, MINIMAL FORMAL TIES WITH SIHANOUK, ONLY INDIRECT CONTACTS THROUGH HANOI WITH THE INSURGENTS. ALTHOUGH THESE TENEIOUS TIES LIMIT SOVIET INFLUENCE I CAMBODIA, THEY ALSO PERMIT WIDE FLEXIBILITY; ALMOST ANY RESOLUTION WOULD BE AN IMPROVEMENT FROM MOSCOW'S STANDPOINT. SOVIET OFFICIALS CONTINUE TO SPEAK FAVORABLE TO US OF THE DESIRABILITY OF A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT, PATTERNED ON THE "LAOS" MODEL. BUT THEY EXPRESS DOUBTS ABOUT HOW THIS COULD COME ABOUT WHEN THE DIFFERING SIDES REFUSE TO MEET EACH OTHER AND WHEN OUTSIDE POWERS SEEM POWERLESS TO PROMOTE A SETTLE-

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MENT. MOSCOW HAS THEREFORE ADJUSTED ITS POSTURE TO SUPPORT AN INSURGENT VICTORY AS THE LEAST UNATTRACTIVE ALTERNATIVE. THE SOVIETS WOULD NO DOUBT PREFER THAT SIHANOUK HAVE NO SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN A SUCCESSOR REGIME, CHIEFLY BECAUSE OF HIS CLOSE LINKS WITH PEKING AND HIS WELL-KNOWN ANTI-SOVIET ATTITUDES. THEY ALSO MUST HAVE SOME DOUBTS ABOUT KHIEU SAMPHAN, WHO SNUBBED THEM ON HIS VISIT TO EASTERN EUROPE LAST YEAR AND WHO HAS BEEN TREATED

FAVORABLY BY PEKING. THEIR BEST BET IS VIA HANOI-- THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WILL CALL THE TUNE IN ANY SETTLEMENT, WHATEVER THE ACTUAL COMPOSITION OF THE NEW REGIME. BUT IF THE TAKE-OVER COMES SOON, MOSCOW'S WISHES WILL PROBABLY COUNT FOR LITTLE AND THEY WILL SIMPLY FLOW WITH THE CURRENT, KEEPING AN EYE ON HANOI FOR GUIDANCE. WE HAVE NO PRECISE INFORMATION ABOUT DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER FIRYUBIN'S RECENT TRIP TO HANOI, BUT SURMISE THAT ONE OF HIS OBJECTIVES MUST HAVE BEEN TO START BUILDING CONNECTIONS WITH THE INSURGENTS WHICH COULD BE EXPANDED WHEN THEY TAKE OVER. THE MOST OBVIOUS INDICATION OF THE NEW SOVIET POSTURE IS THE SPATE OF RECENT COMMENTARY, INCLUDING YURI ZHUKOV'S PIECE IN PRAVDA ON MARCH 23, WHICH SEEKS TO LINE MOSCOW UP ON WHAT IT SEES AS THE WINNING SIDE (REFA).

4. IN VIETNAM THE EQUATION IS DIFFERENT. THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE WITHDRAWAL FROM SEVERAL PROVINCES IN THE FACE OF HANOI'S CONTINUING OFFENSIVE MAY LEAD THE SOVIETS TO DOUBT THE CONTINUED VIABILITY OF THE SAIGON GOVERNMENT, PARTICULARLY IN THE FACE OF SUCH TEPID RESPONSE BY THE CONGRESS. MOSCOW WILL THUS ALMOST CERTAINLY CONTINUE TO RATIONALIZE THE EXPANSION OF "LIBERATED AREAS" WHILE HYPOCRITICALLY HAMMERING SAIGON AND TO A LESSER EXTENT THE U.S. FOR ALLEGEDLY VIOLATING THE PARIS AGREEMENT. THE STAKES ARE HIGHER FOR THE SOVIETS IN SOUTH VIETNAM THAN IN CAMBODIA BECAUSE THEY REMAIN THE PRINCIPAL SUPPLIER OF ARMS TO HANOI, INCLUDING MAJOR ITEMS LIKE TANKS AND HEAVY ARTILLERY. THUS, UNLIKE CAMBODIA, THEY ARE VULNERABLE TO CHARGES OF COMPLICITY IN HANOI'S AGGRESSION. IF THEY ARE CONCERNED ABOUT NEGATIVE U.S. REACTION TO THIS AGGRESSION, AND TO THE CHARGES OF COMPLICITY DIRECTED AT THEM (AND WE THINK CONFIDENTIAL

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THEY ARE), THEY ARE LIKELY TO ADVISE HANOI TO GO SLOWLY IN SOUTH VIETNAM -- POSSIBLY EVEN TO SEEK TO PERSUADE HANOI TO USE ITS MILITARY SUCCESSES TO WIN POLITICAL CONCESSIONS FROM SAIGON. AT THE SAME TIME, THEY WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY CONTINUE TO ARGUE PUBLICLY FOR "STRICT IMPLEMENTATION" OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT, AS THEY HAVE THUS FAR, AND TO SUPPORT A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT. THE COST TO MOSCOW IN TERMS OF DETENTE WITH THE U.S. OBVIOUSLY COUNTS FOR SOMETHING IN MOSCOW'S COST/BENEFIT CALCULATIONS CONCERNING VIETNAM. BUT WE ESTIMATE THAT THE RECENT SHARPENING OF SOVIET PRESS CRITICISM OF THE U.S. IN INDOCHINA INDICATES THAT THEY THINK THE POTENTIAL COST HAS DROPPED IN DIRECT PROPORTION TO THE DROP IN U.S. RESOLVE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

5. IN LAOS THE SOVIETS SEEM SATISFIED WITH THE STATUS
QUO, PROBABLY BECAUSE THEY WERE INSTRUMENTAL IN ARRANGING
THE COALITION AND BECAUSE IT DOES NOT JEOPARDIZE THEIR

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MOSCOW 4207

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INTERESTS WITH THE U.S. OR AGAINST CHINA. AS IN
CAMBODIA, MOSCOW'S INTEREST SEEMS TO PARALLEL HANOI'S,
BUT UNLIKE CAMBODIA, THE SOVIETS HAVE DIRECT LINKS
BOTH TO THE PATHET LAO AND TO THE SOUVANNA GOVERNMENT.
THE SOVIETS ARE CLEARLY AWARE, HOWEVER, THAT THE
LAOTIAN ARRANGEMENT IS "PROVISIONAL" IN NAME AND IN
FACT. THERE IS NO REASON TO ASSUME THAT THE SOVIETS
WOULD ARGUE AGAINST THE EXPANSION OF HANOI'S OR THE
PATHET LAO'S AREAS OF AUTHORITY; ON THE CONTRARY, THEY
WOULD HAVE LITTLE TROUBLE RATIONALIZING "PATRIOT"

SUCCESSES IF THE COALITION FAILS THROUGH PL PRESSURE.
THE FALL OF CAMBODIA AND THE SUBSTANTIAL WEAKENING OF
SAIGON WOULD CERTAINLY CHANGE THE EQUATION IN LAOS AS
WELL. IN SUCH CONDIIONS, MOSCOW WOULD NOT
HESITATE, IN OUR VIEW, TO SUPPORT HANOI AND THE
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INSURGENTS.

6. IN SUM, WE ENVISAGE A SOVIET POLICY WHICH IS REACTIVE
RATHER THAN INNOVATIVE, OPPORTUNISTIC BUT CAUTIOUS. IN
TERMS OF PRIORITIES, INDOCHINA FALLS BELOW SOVIET
CONCERNS ABOUT THE U.S., WESTERN EUROPE, THE MIDDLE
EAST, CHINA, AND PROBABLY SOUTH ASIA. BUT MOSCOW HAS NOT
REASON TO BE DISTURBED BY DEVELOPMENTS THERE -- ON THE
CONTRAY. TE ONLY CONTINGENCY WHICH WOULD GIVE MOSCOW
PAUSE WOULD BE THE RISK OF A POSSIBLE STEBACK IN ITS
REPLATIONS WITH WASHINGTON AS A RESULT OF ITS VIETNAM
POLICY. GEVEN CONGRESSIONAL REACTIONS TO EVENTS IN
SOUTHEAST ASIA, THIS NOW SEEMS VERY UNLIKELY TO THE
SOVIETS. THUS, THEIR CURRENT OVERRIDING POLICY SEEMS
TO BE CLOSE IDENTIFICATION WITH HANOI IN THE HOPE OF
ENCOURAGING MAXIMUM VIETNAMESE INDEPENDENCE FROM
CHINA.
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